

Nigerian Pidgin in Chinua Achebe's Fictions

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Abstract

It is sad to observe that, in Nigeria, Nigerian Pidgin (Naija) has not gained its needed attention, irrespective of the fact that it is a neutral language of in. The present study therefore, examines Naija in literary work, with a focus on Chinua Achebe's: *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of Savannah*. The study aims to ascertain the extent NP is used in literature and to show how characters in the novels studied, use Pidgin. Selected excerpts from the novels are data for the study. Through a purposive sampling method, ten excerpts were selected for the study. The study adopts Spencer Oatey's rapport management as its theoretical consideration. Finding from the study shows that characters in the novels use NP as a rapport management strategy. The study recommends that the teaching of Nigerian Pidgin to children in lower basic schools be implemented, particularly, in areas where NP is a first language.

Key words: Communicative Strength, Naija, Recognized, official, Literary

Introduction

Language is a functional aspect of human existence that plays important roles in the daily affairs of man. It provides humans with the possibility of interacting with one another, communicating ideas, transmitting values, feelings and goals. Sourian language is, "a guide to social and political relationships within a community..." (Cited in Oyekan, 335). It is a basic requirement and an indispensable tool in human society. Over the years, language have been developed so powerfully to the advancement of human existence

In Nigeria, for instance, there are about five-hundred and fourteen (514) languages in use: Five-hundred and twelve (Ethnologue, 2016) indigenous languages, the Nigerian Pidgin and the English language. English language is the official language. Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba languages are the major indigenous languages while the Nigerian Pidgin has no official status, despite its linguistic functions in Nigeria society. Giwa notes "no language is widely and better used than Nigeria Pidgin but on official ground, it does not exist" (17). Balogun (1982) reiterates: "Nigeria Pidgin has no explicit official recognition yet it is used by the educated and uneducated Nigerians in inter-ethnic communication, when compared to use of English. For instance, in Delta State, particularly in the Warri area, where there are many indigenous residents with diverse ethnic languages, Nigerian Pidgin flourishes as a medium of inter-ethnic communication and a bridge between the young and the old, the educated and the uneducated. It is one language in Nigeria that has become indispensable and whose communicative import cannot be overstated, yet it lacks the needed

recognition. Those who use it, treats it as Elugbe (1995) rightly points ‘pikin wen no get papa yet everibodi de sen am message’.

Todd (1974) describes Pidgin as: “A marginal language that arises to fulfill specific communication needs in well defined circumstances; a language which arises from the need to communicate among people who have no common language”. According to Reinecke (cited in Elugbe,1991) describes Pidgin as “a minimum or makeshift language which arises when men of different speech are thrown into contact and must reach an understanding...” A Pidgin which has become the mother tongue of a certain population is referred to as Creole. This is the case in Pupa New Guinea, where Tok Pisin is spoken by the majority of the citizens. It is the country’s official language. It is recorded that between five to six million people use Tok Pisin, to a large degree. Though, not all citizens of Pupa New Guinea speak the language well, many now learn it as a first language. This is not the case in Nigeria, where there are various languages used. It is observed that of all languages in Nigeria, NP is the most widely used. However, no official status has been conferred on Pidgin, unlike, English language and the three major Nigerian languages, which are conferred the position of official language and major indigenous languages respectively. Elugbe and Omamorviews Nigeria Pidgin as a language in its own right, with all the characteristics and potentialities of a natural language. The present study aims to show how interactants, in two of Achebe’s novels use NP communicative. This is intended to enhance the available discourse on NP.

The universal human development in contact situation gave rise to Pidgin. Ativie (2009) says that ‘the English based Pidgin has been in the country for upwards of five hundred years now, especially in the Niger Delta where it was initially cultured’, However, some other scholars believes that the freed slaves from Sierra-Leone brought the language to Badagry, in Lagos, in the late 19th century (Ekundayo, 2018). Irrespective of views, it is ubiquitous that Naija has its history in the contact between multilingual coastal communities of Nigeria and visiting European explorers/ traders-first, the Portuguese, then, briefly, the Dutch; and, finally, the English. Initially, when the European explorers came to Nigeria, there was language barrier. They could neither understand, nor speak a word of the indigenous language but needed urgently, to interact, with the Nigerian natives, for the purpose of trade and other human activities hence, NP emerges as a barrier breaker. However,

Nigerian Pidgin was initially used between the visiting English men and their Nigeria host. Gradually, Nigerians who had no common language resorted to the use of NP. Mafeni (1971) notes that:

Nigerian Pidgin is essentially a product of urbanization. While its origin lies historically . . . on the coast, its development and spread is the result of contacts between Africans. The rapidly growing towns of Nigeria have increasingly become the melting pots of the many tribes and races which constitute Nigeria and Pidgin seems to be today a very widely spoken lingua franca, many towns and city dwellers being at least bilingual in Pidgin and an indigenous language.

NP is a unifying language in Nigeria where over 500 indigenous languages are in use, each in competition with the other, and trying to prove which language among them should be most reputable, respected and highly rated. It is spoken by greater percentage of the populace particularly in multi ethnic and multi lingual areas such as Delta, Lagos and Abuja. It is widely used both in formal and informal settings and across ethnic and religious divides. Even though, it has not been given an official recognition and some elites still see it as the language of the illiterate, its communicative potentials and relevance cannot be denied. Pidgin has made considerable inroads into settings where Standard English was originally used. For instance, news in radio and television are broadcast in Pidgin as well in Standard English. Also, advertisements on billboards, in Nigeria, are written in Pidgin as well in Standard English. Again in religious settings, NP is used in churches either to deliver sermon or to interpret sermons delivered in Standard English or in Indigenous languages. Also, use of NP is evident in the literary works of Chinua Achebe, Ezenwa Ohaeto, Aig-I moukhuede and Ken Saro-wiwa.

Nigerian Pidgin is used by Achebe in diverse ways that appeals to his audience, and this, have attracted a lot of scholarly interest. These range from literary studies to linguistic inquiries. In areas of literary research, scholars have investigated such areas as thematic preoccupation (Ajibade, 2017). Also in areas of linguistic inquiry, scholars have studied language and style (Hanna, 2007); use of pidgin as speech accommodation technique (Ifechelobi and Ifechelobi, 2016). The present study examines Nigerian Pidgin in literary work with a focus on Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of Savannah*. The choice of the novels is as a result of the fact that Achebe is one of the fore-fathers of modern African literature, whose style is highly appreciated by scholars, literates and even some illiterates. He is grounded in English but chooses to use English and NP language in some of his novels.

Objective of the Study

The study aims to examine NP in literary works and to show how Achebe's uses Pidgin in *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of Savannah*.

Statement of Problem

In Nigeria, so many problems are rooted in the multiplicity of language. There is no sense of nationhood and genuine unity. Attempts to pick a language that will help foster national unity, have yielded no result. Nigerian Pidgin, which is a neutral language in Nigeria is relegated to the background. Hence, to show how NP is used, becomes a problem of this study.

These entire problems..With the ubiquitous problems arising from language multiplicity, it becomes imperative to show how.**Research Questions**

As a direction for the study, the researcher postulates the following questions:

- i. How is NP used in literary works?
- ii. How did Achebe use NP to communicate to his audience?

Methodology

The study is a qualitative research whose data is drawn from Achebe's *A Man of the People*. The study is limited to Nigerian Pidgin and literary genre. The research adopts purposive sampling method. The novels, *A man of the People* and *Anthills of Savannah* were read several times, to identify instances of NP. The identified instances of Pidgin were isolated for further study. And through a random sampling method ten excerpts were selected from both novels; five from *A man of the People* and five from *Anthills of Savannah* respectively.

The analysis was done to a textual data, using rapport management theory as developed by Helen Spencer-Oatey (2000). This method as suggested by MC Kee (2003) is meant to understand how the data from the text can be meaningfully interpreted into a theory. The data samples are reported as the textual evidences.

Literature Review

Emenike and Asuzu (2018) examines Nigerian Pidgin in billboard advertisement in Nigeria. The aim of the study is to find out the motivation behind the use of Pidgin in the advertizement of goods and services. Through a purposive method of research, fifty (50) samples were selected for the study. The accommodation theory was used as the study's theoretical framework. Findings from the study shows that Pidgin serves as a barrier breaker, popular culture, source of creativity and vehicle for realization of Nigerian identity in the context of billboard advertisement. For these roles, the motivation behind Pidgin as a language of advertisement is because it serves as a means of mass appeal to Nigerians, across linguistic and cultural divides. The present study is focus on literary work and not on the media.

Ifechelobi and Ifechelobi, (2016) in same vein, examined the use of Pidgin in Achebe's *A Man of the People*. Through textual analytical method of research, the study adopts language accommodation theory to interpret its data. The study notes that Achebe's use of Nigerian Pidgin in his novel at a time NP was called a hybrid language to a large extent reverse the prejudice against Pidgin and prove that, that which was given a low status can be used positively by post-colonial writers to add aesthetic value and cultural relevance to their writings.

Osoba (2014) examines the functions of Nigerian Pidgin. The purpose is to establish how Pidgin advertises the intended meaning of the advertisers and how the audience perceives them. Data was collected for the study through listening to radio and television broadcast. Findings from the study show that the Nigerian Pidgin is used among the educated and barely educated. The study also notes the use of Pidgin in the mass media, government offices and schools despite the fact that it is not an official language of the country.

Hanna (2007) carries out a research entitled *Code-switching in Chinua Achebe's Novels*. The aim of the study is to point out how Achebe uses different features of Igbo and Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) in his novels to accommodate the African thought-pattern. The study examines how the Igbo lexicon and proverbs function in the texts and if/how it is possible to understand the meaning of the Igbo vocabulary. Again, the study examines whether Achebe himself expresses NPE to extend the frontiers of English or follow the norm set up by other linguists, or if Achebe alters their usage according to his own style. The study reveals Achebe's success as he interweaves Igbo expressions and vocabulary within the confines of English grammatical structures without making the texts incomprehensible. His inclusion of many Igbo words, proverbs, folktales and rhythm helps to project the Igbo world view in a different perspective from that of English writers. This study differs so much from the present study which adopts rapport management as its theoretical consideration.

Dutta (2010) conducted a study entitled "Bearing the Burden of Native Experience: A Stylistic Analysis of Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*." The aim of the study is to illustrate how Achebe creatively extends the frontiers of English language to accommodate the various shades of Nigerian reality. In order to capture a vivid picture of Nigeria of the late 1920s, in which the novel is set, the study adopts stylistic criticism as its theoretical framework. The study examines the different kinds of narrative strategies employed by Achebe in *Arrow of God*. The study shows how Achebe successfully used the colonizer's language to make it bear the burden of his native experience. Though, this study

is on style, the present study analyses Achebe's novels under the four categories of rapport management.

From the examination of the existing literature on Chinua Achebe's works presented above, it is obvious that Pidgin adds both aesthetic and functional values to literary works, a view which the present study upholds. However, no study has been done on Achebe's use of Pidgin, with respect to how human beings successfully use language to build harmonious or disharmonious relationships in a communicative event.

Nigerian Pidgin in Literary work

Nigerian Pidgin used to be in the spoken form. It was used mostly for oral literature in form of folktales, proverbs, work chants songs and the likes but gradually, the written form of NP developed. One of the earliest surviving written texts is the diary of Anterra, which is termed some form of ancestors of Pidgin. Todd in Elugbe describes the language of Anterra Duke Diary as “. . . approximation to the English spoken in Calabar at the time”. This concretizes Tonkins position that the diary cannot represent the way Anterra Duke spoke since it seems to involve . . . “a mixture of literate and spoken forms”. However, if the language of Anterra Duke diary is described in purely linguistic terms, it must be one of the earliest surviving text written in NP” (Elugbe and Omamor , 125).

Nigerian Pidgin is used extensively in literary domain. Otor points: “The issue of commitment in literature is a major theme as far as literary expressions in Pidgin English{sic} is concerned” (37). This assertion is correct when one considers the range of literary works done in Pidgin, such works as: Prof Ezenwa- Ohaeto's poem “De poem Go Talk; General Mamman Vatsa's poem, “*Tori for Get Bow Leg*”; Florence Orabueze's collection of poems” I wan Be President For Life, Dis our Country Sef and Sharing De National Cake” ” Aig Imoukhuede's “*My Pidgin Stew and Sufferhead*”; and Ken Saro Wiwa's full length novel, *Sozaboy*. The use of Nigerian Pidgin equally abounds in the works of literary icons like Wole Soyinka, Festus Iyayi, Gabriel Okara and of course the great story teller, Chinua Achebe, whose works are the focus of the present study. Agheyisi (1984), Elugbe and Omamor (1991), Osoba (2000) and others have earlier suggested the adoption of Pidgin as an official language. A notable reason adduced is the fact that it is the fastest growing common language in Nigeria today.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopts Helen Spencer-Oatey's (2000) Rapport Management as its theoretical base. The theory is concerned with how human beings successfully

use language to build harmonious or disharmonious relationships in a communicative event. Spencer-Oatey's (2000) discusses rapport in relation to face in social relations, in that face is associated with social values and sociality rights which are fundamental personal/social entitlements that individual claim for themselves in their interaction with others. Spencer-Oatey's rapport management identifies two aspects of human desire that need to be considered in face management, and these are: (1) quality face: our desire to be thought of positively in terms of personal qualities and (2) identity face: our desire that our social identity or roles be acknowledged and upheld. Central to the realization of rapport management are such linguistic strategies such as turn-taking, choice of code/dialect, syntax and lexis. Spencer-Oatey (2000) identifies rapport orientation as a key influence to face management. He equally identifies four types of rapport orientations that are discernable in every human interaction. These are:

Rapport - enhancementorientation: a desire to strengthen or enhance harmonious relations between the interlocutors;

Rapport - maintenanceorientation: a desire to maintain or protect harmonious relations between the interlocutors;

Rapport - neglectorientation: a lack of respect in the quality of relationship between the interlocutors (perhaps because of a focus on self);

Rapport - challengeorientation: a desire to challenge or impair harmonious relations between the interlocutors.

These four categories of rapport orientations can be used to analyze language within interaction. It is on these categories that excerpts for the present study are analyzed, in order to show how NP is used between interactants in the novels under study.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Data was analyzed under the four categories of rapport orientation, using textual analysis method of research, in order to explicate how Naija language is used within interaction, in the novels under study.

Excerpt 1

'You call this speed? You never see something my brother. I no de keep anini for myself, na so so troway. If some person come to you and say "I wan make you minister" make you run like blazes comot. Na true word I tell you. To God who made me... 'Big man, big palaver', said the one eyed man. 'Me one, he said. 'i no kuku mind the jatakata wey de for inside. make you put minister money for my hand and all the wahala on top. I no mind at all'. Everyone laughed. then Mrs. John said:

'No be so, my frien'. When you done experience rich man's trouble you no fit talk that again. My people get one proverb; they say that when poor man done see with im own eye how make big man e go beg make e carry him poverty de go je-je.' (AMOP, 15)

The above excerpt is an exchange among three persons: Mrs. Eleanor, (who is from Pokoma) chief. Nanga and the one eyed man. They discuss the challenges and benefits of being a minister in Nigeria. Here, Pidgin is used to enhance communication outcome. 'No be so, my frien' is an instance of face enhancement strategy where interrogation is used to amplify human relationship aimed at achieving the interactional goal of the interlocutors. It is worthy of note that the use of Naija in the context neutralizes the distance among interlocutors and mitigates the influence of power. Chief Nanga is a minister and therefore a powerful person in the context of interaction. Also, in Anthills of Savannah, we find such face enhancement strategy:

Excerpt 2

'Na you get this car?'

'Yes, anything the matter?'

'Why you no put parking light?'.....

'...So when you see electric for somebody wall it follow say you no go put your parking light? What section of traffic law be that one?'

'It's a matter of common sense I should say,'

Common sense! So me self I no get common sense; na so you talk.

OK, Mr common sense , make I see your particulars.' (AHS, 128)

The above is an exchange between Ikem, the editor of National gazette and some police men that are at a check point. The exchange as recorded in Pidgin as used by Nkem in response to the question by the police officers that are barely literate. It is obvious that in this encounter the novelist uses Pidgin to define the educational qualification of the policemen who can barely speak good English. The use of Pidgin by Ikem as recorded by the novelist is to identify with the police officers in a positive manner. This is actually meant to enhance rapport in a face threatening encounter.

Below is an exchange between Chris and the taxi driver

Excerpt 3

'You think you no go forget your job again? His companion asked teasingly. 'when you

no fit talk again that timefear come catch me proper and I begin pray make this man

no go introduce himself as Commissioner for Information?'

'me Commissioner? At all. Na small small motor part naim I de sell.

Original and

Taiwan.’

‘Ehe! Talkam like that. No shaky-shaky mouth again. But Oga you see now, to be big

man no hard but to be poor man No be small thing. Na proper wahala, no be so?’

‘Na so I see-o. I no know before today say to pass for Small man, you need to go special

college.’ His companion liked that and laughed long and loud. ‘Na True you talk, oga.

Special college. Poor man Elementary Certificate!’ (AHS, 194)

Here, pidgin is used in an attempt to maintain a harmonious relation between the interlocutors. Also, in *A Man of the People*, there is also the use of Pidgin to maintain relationship in a face threatening situation:

Excerpt 4

. . . . If you like I can bring you six girls this evening. **You go do the thing sotay you go**

beg say you no want again. Ha, ha, ha, ha’

The above is an exchange between Chief Nanga and Odili, the village teacher whom Chief Nanga wants to assist with a job in the city. The exchange ordinarily is that of unequal relationship between a superior and a subordinate, but because Chief Nanga (the superior) belittled himself in an illicit sexual relationship with Ebie, Odili’s girlfriend, there is a conflict between the duo which threatened the communication process. Chief Nanga who is the superior in this context had to resort to the use of Pidgin in order to manage the situation. In this case, the use of Pidgin by Chief Nanga is purely a rapport maintenance strategy that is aimed at protecting harmonious relationship between the interlocutors. Also in *Anthills of Savannah* a similar trend is shown when the superintendent of police admonishes some junior officers concerning their encounter with Ikem, the editor of National Gazette:

Excerpt 5

‘Now all of you listen well. You see this man here. Make una look im face well well. If any of you go out tomorrow and begin to fool around his car I go give the person proper gballi_gballi. You understand?’

‘Yes sir’

As could be observed, the exchange is recorded in Pidgin. The superintendent of police in his use of pidgin hopes to maintain a harmonious relationship between the editor (Ikem) and the junior police officers even in a life threatening encounter. Besides rapport enhancement and rapport maintenance orientations, pidgin is equally used in several instances in *A Man of the People* and in *Anthills of Savannah* to show rapport - neglect orientation and rapport - challenge orientation:

Excerpt 6

'look here Odili, he turned on me then like an incensed leopard, 'I will not stomach any nonsense from any small boy for the sake of a common woman, you hear] **if you insult me again I will show you pepper.** You young people of today are very ungrateful. Imagine? Anyway don't insult me again-o...'

This is an exchange between Chief Nanga and Odili, the village teacher. It indicates an instance of rapport neglect. Here, Pidgin is used to show lack of interest in the quality of relationship enacted by the interlocutors. From the above, it could be seen that pidgin is not just used as a rapport enhancement strategy but also as a rapport neglect strategy. Again, in *Anthills of Savannah* we see a neglect in the quality of relationship between interlocutors:

Excerpt 7

'I no know am! Na sake of editor he come abuse me wen I de do my work. He no abuse you. I de here all the time; Make you shout your smelling mouth there. Abi you wan come with me for charge office. You no hear when e say e no get common sense. That no be abuse for your country?. Na you people dey make the law na you de break am.....

Where your insurance? Come for traffic office for Monday morning. If u no come or you go come late you go answer for court. Come for Monday with the cover paper ... Before you begin complain like monkey wen im mother die' (*Anthills of Savannah*, 129)

This exchange is between the master of ceremony in Harmony Hotel, Ikem and a police man. Pidgin as a rapport neglect strategy is used in this instance to show lack of respect in the quality of relationship between Nkem and the police man.

Excerpt 8

'you can't do fuck-all' I said. You are just a bush...' I cut myself short and walked out, lumbering my suitcase pass Dogo the one-eyed stalwart who had presumably heard our voices and came out from the boys' Quarters in his sleeping loins-cloth to investigate.

Na this boy dey halla so for master im face? I heard him ask. Don't mind the stupid idiot', said Chief Nanga 'E no fit insult master like that here and comot free. Hey! My friend! He shouted, coming after me. 'Are you there?' His voice was full of menace... 'Leave am, Dogo. Make e carry im bad luck de go. Na my own mistake for bring am here. Ungrateful ingrate!

The above is an exchange between Chief Nanga (The Minister of Culture) and Dogo, one of his loyal followers. In an effort to address a challenging situation, Chief Nanga uses pidgin as a rapport management strategy between himself and

Dogo who is barely educated. In the context, Dogo also uses pidgin with a desire to challenge a harmonious relationship between himself and chief Nanga when he says: ‘you can’t do fuck all’...’.

Excerpt 9

‘wait your head!’ screamed his employer...

‘Why you put poison for my coffee?’

‘Me? Put poison for master...’

This exchange is between Chief Koko and his cook. Here, Chief Koko accuses his cook of poisoning his coffee. This is an instance of rapport challenge which is purely aimed at impairing the harmonious relationship between the interlocutors. This scenario is also depicted in Achebe’s *No Longer at Ease*, where, a senior clerk is berating Mr Obi for not providing a stamp with which to seal his car loan agreement. He addresses Mr. Obi in NP:

You get B. A but you no know say you have to affix stamp to agreement? (59)

The above expressions means, ‘You hold a B. A degree and you don’t know that a stamp has to be affixed to an agreement document? Here, NP is used to show lack of respect in the quality of relationship between interlocutors. The senior clerk berates Mr. Obi for his failure to do the right thing, despite the fact that he educated.

Excerpt 10

‘ You explain what? I beg you, no make me vex... imagine! Hmm! But woman don chop sand for this world – o... Imagine! But na we de caus am: na we own fault If I no kuku bring my stupid narsh come dump for your bedroom you for de kick me about like I be football? I no blame you at all!’

The above exchange is between Elewa and her boyfriend Ikem. Elewa felt Ikem did not love her enough because he did not want her to sleep in his house. Here, pidgin is used in an attempt to impair the harmonious relationship between Ikem and Elewa.

Discussion

Nigerian Pidgin is copiously and variously represented both in poetry and in novel. Nigerian Pidgin used in novel, is prosaic in nature. One striking feature of literature is literariness’. Michel Foucault in Otor notes that, literature is: “. . . a particular language whose peculiar mode of being is literary” (42). Michel’s assertion suggests that literature in whichever genre is hinged on language. As literature assumes different genres and forms e.g drama, prose, poetry, spoken or written, the language whose particular mode of being is literary will also manifest in different ways. For instance, the NP is in a simple and conversational form. All excerpts used for the data are free flowing, which is reflective of everyday usage. There are no ambiguities in the narratives as to bring about a

misinterpretation of what is said..The Pidgin utterances of interlocutors are transparent in terms of denoting what they mean. Moreso, the utterances are speakers defined. This is a way to knowing or identifying a character: what he says; what others say about the character and what the author says about the character. Again, the introduction of the Standard English to Pidgin expressions in some cases, could be traceable to the high educational backgrounds of the writers, who also are capable of using the Standard variety but chose to include the 'excluded' via the use of Pidgin.

Conclusion

From the analysis of data, it is observed that Nigerian Pidgin is used as a form of politeness for harmonious and disharmonious relationships, depending on the communicative goals of the interactants. For instance, in excerpt one, Pidgin is used by Eleno, Mr Nanga and the one-eyed man in order to enhance their communicative outcome of enhancing harmonious relationship.

Finally, it is important to note that the use of Pidgin to build harmonious or disharmonious relationships in a interactions, could further enhance our understanding, of the use of language, in the writings of Chinua Achebe, in particular and literary works, in general.

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